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THE CONTEXT OF PHILIPPINE SOLIDARITY FOR EAST TIMOR

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The Philippines is located in Southeast Asia. However, due to its colonial history, it looks at itself and the world through American blue eyes. It is in this context that it is important for Filipinos to locate East Timor, its people and their struggle.

Out of four centuries of protest and revolt against Spain, the Filipino nation was born when the successful revolution against Spain was launched in 1896. By 1898, the Filipinos were in control of the entire archipelago except for a few isolated and insignificant outposts and the walled city of Manila. But a new colonizer was already waiting in the wings. Victory was snatched from the Filipino revolutionaries. A new and more insidious colonialism was to be foisted on the Philippines. After a long and bloody Philippine-American War, where over a million Filipino lives were lost, the Americans, with the collaboration of most of the Filipino elite, took control. Then they robbed us of our history, cut off our tongue, and molded our consciousness into that of little brown Americans.

The Filipino people are now in the long and arduous process of completing the Philippine Revolution of 1896 to regain our true identity in freedom and dignity.

In the same vein, the East Timorese attained their independence in 1975 after centuries of struggle against their Portuguese colonizers. However, their taste of freedom was barely a whiff as Indonesia bullied its way into the territory annexing it as their 27th province. Since then, 200,000 people--at least two-thirds of the entire Timorese people were killed.

The struggle in East Timor calls on freedom-loving peoples to support their just cause. But in addition to moral and humanitarian imperatives, valid reasons enough to elicit solidarity, we see the East Timorese people's struggle as a source of strength in our own struggle for freedom, justice and democracy. We see similarities and lessons that may help contribute to our efforts to réawaken our slumbering mass memory and add flame to our struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism. In turn, we hope that our own efforts towards liberation will similarly inspire the Maubere people to resolutely keep their struggle for self-determination.

Our solidarity, therefore, is simply part of the cycle of mutual exchange between sisters and brothers, a strengthening of the bond among those who fight against oppression and for genuine freedom.

In the concrete, the Philippine broad progressive movement is thus prepared to host an international conference on East Timor not only to bring further attention to the issue but to bring East Timor to Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, which has remained largely silent.

While it is fully our intention to bring into the conference the active participation of mainstream political parties and prominent Filipino personalities, the core of our conference organizing group (which will subsequently be converted into a Filipino solidarity network for East Timor) is initially composed of all the major progressive political tendencies, parliamentarians of the street if you will. I cannot underscore enough the fact that these groups have different visions and ideological perspectives. But I must equally stress the fact that all are prepared to subsume their differences to points of unity. All are prepared to seek out areas of common concern to work out common goals. And inspite of their contradictions, all are actively seeking to reach consensus on various issues and at different levels and act together. The East Timor question in one such basis of unity.

BLACK AND NOT ALONE

Alien Cultures
Different histories
Faces I do not know
Names stranger still
Many tongues my ears cannot hear
But my heart understands.
I am she who has not been degraded a thousand times
For we are not around.
He is me who has not been exterminated
For we do not exist.
They are my people who have no tomorrow
For we have been robbed of our past.
Because we never were.
But I look into his eyes and feel her heart beat...
We are alive
We sing in the night of tomorrow's sunrise
We live for today and fight for our birth.

She called me black
He called me brother
And I am
We are
But we fight alone.
In our little worlds we are alone
In the solitude of our togetherness we struggle for freedom.

I cannot fight your battles,
You cannot win mine.
But cheer me on
As I do.
We shall intensify our struggles
Even as we draw inspiration from each other.
And when we have won our victories,
We will embrace across the oceans
In the dignity of our liberation,
Never again to be alone.